

Gospel Luke 18:35-43

“In the Holy Spirit is the cause of the salvation of all. When He blows on anyone as befits His nature, He quickly uplifts them from anything mundane, He gives them wings, He gives them growth, He gives them high position.” (Orthros first Antiphon)

The story of Zacchaeus’s encounter with Jesus is simple and beautiful. We could picture the events with joy. It is in a way both unexpected and at the same time developing in a natural way. The gospel helps us to see the events through the eyes of a sinner who acts with creativity and through the eyes of God, who has a special and personal love for him. The man who lives in sins, without knowing salvation, suddenly desires to see Christ who is passing by that day. And Jesus utters his name with the same familiarity and love with which he uttered the name of Nathaniel, whom he alone had seen under the fig tree. God knows the depth of the heart of the sinner. He knows the longing desire for love of the one who is excluded by the community because of his own sins. It helps us, the sinners, to understand how important it is to never forget this desire to be with Christ. Because out of this desire, the Holy Spirit moves us to the encounter with Christ who is passing by that day. The first antiphon of Orthros today helps us understand how this story is possible. What moves Zacchaeus to look for Jesus, what moves him to act? He who was a chief tax collector and rich. He who had the bitter taste of living without salvation. Although of small stature, he had been given the heavy burden of richness he had accumulated, and this weighed heavier each day on his shoulders. All of a sudden, he feels light, and he can move with the quick step of the resurrection. He resembles the light on Pascha, when it spreads from candle to candle, with purpose and life, with a silent expectation of a mystery ready to be uncovered, of a human heart that is open with the expectation of joy and new life. Without knowing it before hand. The antiphon helps us to understand that it is the Holy Spirit who moves Zachaeus that day. Because so it befits Him that day, to blow on Zachaeus. To uplift him from his mundane life, to give him wings, in order to climb the tree, to give him growth, him who was small of stature, to give him high position, so he can see Jesus who is passing by that day. To have high position to be also seen by Jesus and together with Him to be seen by all who know who he is, who know his sins.



Zachaeus in the sycamore tree, prefigures Christ naked on the cross. He cannot hide. He is judged by people with no mercy, reminding him of who he is. God's love for him makes him repent of his sins publicly, like the good thief. The gentle touch of the Holy Spirit that moved Zacchaeus to act and climb the tree would not have anticipated for him his own judgement day, his public exposure, and his resurrection. The initial touch of the Holy Spirit would have been gentle, and he was not resistant, discovering in him, (as David was confessing on Friday at lunch) an intriguing curiosity for the unknown. What followed had dynamis, unexpected confrontation and unexpected love and complete forgiveness, generosity for the poor that only God could have. Now we see it in Zacchaeus. It is important for us to notice that the first sign of repentance is the love for the poor. They become the first ones to experience Zacchaeus' change of heart. They are the first ones to experience his repentance because, as we heard many times the fathers of the church say, they are the first ones who are hurt by the financial injustice that takes place within the community at large. Repentance has a precise movement and practicality, as Carlos was saying on Friday. And the first movement and inclination of the heart is towards the poor. That is where the repentance acts first. If the sycamore tree had practicality for Zachaeus in seeing the face of Christ, so the poor have practicality when it comes to our repentance. The church is the place where we practice repentance because here, we can share with the poor whatever we accumulated within our heart, both richness and sins. Because as they are open to receive the goodness, they are also ready to forgive the sins.

"Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

Francis on Friday saw Zachaeus like a person who thought of himself as not being worthy of the love of others, as not being worthy of the love of God. He was a sinner and unclean. He felt in his heart unworthy of anything good that would come from the other, man or God himself. Because he was a sinner, because he was marginalized. The heart of this marginalized person received, in our community, the empathy of the poor who can put themselves in his shoes. That's why he kept at a distance, Francis thought. Because he was unclean, and he could not touch anybody. However, Jesus had a word for him. It seemed that Jesus ought to stay at his house that day. Why?

Last week, a couple of our brothers, who have been coming frequently to church during the week or on Sundays for the past year, confessed that they are making plans to go back home. It seems that Canadian culture is winning. It is victorious in making people feel undesired here, pushing them out. In making them feel small like Zacchaeus. One of them was confessing at lunch this week that he thought Canada was a good country. He was taught that way. And he came, fleeing the civil war, looking for a new life even at his age (maybe early 60's). He could not fully explain his thought, he said smiling that English was too much for him to learn at his

age. He tried hard. Just as he tried to find a job. But he failed at both. He asked another person to come and translate for him. He feels defeated, but he smiles. Even defeated and humiliated, he feels he owes a smile to God. He has tears in his eyes that render back his dignity. He wants to make sure that we understand so he asks several times our volunteer to translate. "You know, Christ approaches you as a beggar. (We might say, in the light of today's gospel, when he passes by that day). He is naked, hungry and thirsty. That's how I came every day at church. And you welcomed me. Canada was not good for me. But the church here was kind with me, every day I came. May God bless this community."

Jesus does not say much today. He is passing by before going to Jerusalem. He asks for a shelter. Before going to Jerusalem. Where he was going to experience the rejection of the human heart full heartedly. He asks Zacchaeus for hospitality. He asks the heart of a sinner, who knows what it means to be an outcast. Jesus, out of the purity of his love for us, Zacchaeus out of his sins. He must stay at his house today. To be welcomed. And to experience the repentance of sinners, to witness his repentance that shares in his love for the poor.

In Canada these days, Christ is in the lives of all those who are told that they are undesired, and they better go home where war, hunger, and death are going to take care of them. The church ought to welcome them today and offer hospitality, before anything else. The gathering of sinners is taught by the "strangers" the love for the poor, as a sign of new life and a sweet taste of the resurrection, where salvation is witnessed, tasted and lived this very day.

On Friday at lunch, David talked about how he learned in his life to like the unknown. He was talking first about the universe, pondering on its depth, and then about everything else that touches on the mystery of our life and on our death. The call of following Christ is gentle, and we learn to trust this call, and this call takes us through the places He must go: the cross, the tomb, the resurrection, ascension and his second coming. Zacchaeus acts on this call. He leans upon the movement. With the expectation of joy.



St Silouan Chapel at St John's Mission
155 Broadview Ave. Toronto, ON M4M 2E9
T: 416-466-1357 E: info@stjohnsmmission.org W: stjohnsmmission.org

St Zoticos Orthodox Church at Good Neighbours Mission
193 Markham Rd Scarborough, ON M1J 3C3
T: 647-358-4105



We are an apostolate of the ecumenical patriarchate "Mother Church of Christ's poor" under
the Omophorion of Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

St. Silouan Chapel, January 26, 2025

4 of 4

©2025 St. John the Compassionate Mission

www.stjohnsmmission.org